

AN AUSTRALIAN RECORD OF THE STILT SANDPIPER

Micropalama himantopus

by John L. McKean*, A.L. Hertog* and
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On 30 August, 1980 at 0730 hours while carrying out a bird census at the Sanderson sewerage Ponds, Darwin, we located a Stilt Sandpiper *Micropalama himantopus* in partial nuptial plumage on the edge of a small brackish pond. Curlew sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea* and a Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* were available for comparison. McKean's field description at the time follows:

A slender wader with yellowish green long legs standing noticeably higher than the Curlew Sandpipers but shorter than the Black-tailed Godwit. Bill blackish, about double the length of the head, longer than those of the Curlew Sandpipers, down curved towards the tip. Dark brown crown. Mantle greyish with many of the minor wing-coverts and a patch of the scapular feathers blackish. The irregular distribution of the

dark feathers indicates a change from nuptial to eclipse plumage. Under parts whitish with some vertical striping on sides of throat, barring across the chest with traces on the flanks. The undertail coverts and vent were well marked with bars, again obviously the remains of nuptial plumage.

When flushed half an hour later the white rump with dark end of upper tail and the lack of a white wing stripe were seen to advantage. Hertog glimpsed the underwing in flight and considered it probably barred.

McKean, Hertog and H.A.F. Thompson found the Stilt Sandpiper at the same pond at 1630 hours on the same day. All the identification points previously noted were rechecked and confirmed and Thompson succeeded in obtaining a number of



photographs of it. The bird was seen in the same locality again on the 31st August, 1980 by Rita Cullerton, Hertog, McKean and Thompson. Hertog and Thompson succeeding in obtaining more photographs. It was seen at the same time locality on 1 September, 1980 by Johnny Estbergs and McKean.

Palmer(1967) gives the breeding distribution as across North America from north-east Alaska to Hudson Bay and counter clockwise in tundra zone around that bay at least as far as James Bay. The Stilt Sandpiper migrates through North America to its winter range in Central and South America, reaching as far south as Uruguay and Central Argentina. The species has occurred as a straggler in western Alaska, Sweden and Britain, but not previously in the Australasian region.

Autumnal migration(Northern hemisphere) apparently takes place in two waves, the first comprising breeding adults and beginning about mid-August. Conjecture as to the route taken by the Darwin vagrant seems pointless.

REFERENCE

Palmer, Ralph S. (1967) in "The Shorebirds of North America" Ed. G.D. Stout
Viking Press: New York 270pp.

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BOOK REVIEWS

HANDLIST OF BIRDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

By Allan K. Morris, A.R. McGill and Glenn Holmes.

Published by N.S.W. Field Ornithologists Club, and available to Darwin members through the N.T.F.N.C. or from the N.S.W. F.O.C., C/- 225 Kissing Point Road, Turramura, N.S.W. 2074, for \$7.50 (post and packing 70 cents per copy extra).

Arnold McGill's 'Handlist of the Birds of New South Wales' (1960) has been long out of print and the last 20 years have seen a flurry of ornithological activity enabling this much needed present publication to be much broader than a simple revision. The work is more than just a list of the birds recorded in New South Wales. Each of the 529 species treated has its status in N.S.W. described which includes a summary of the data available on occurrence, abundance, movements, distribution, habitat preferences and breeding season (egg laying

dates given). I was unable to fault the information given on any of the species I checked.

I am particularly pleased to see the authors have not seen fit to always follow the R.A.O.U.'s mandates on scientific and 'common' names such as the nauseating Thick-knee. However, while there may be some merit in considering *Pardalotus striatus* an incipient species, separation of the forms *ornatus*, *substriatus* and *melanocephalus* at the full level is quite ridiculous! This does not really detract in any way from the real worth of this most valuable reference works on the birds of New South Wales.

I thoroughly recommend it to anyone whose interests in birds lie beyond our N.T. boundaries; and buy it now, before it goes out of print.

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